

COMMUNITY UPDATE

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Council
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Smallest property tax increase in South County history!

Taxpayers in the Sixth County Council District and throughout King County received a special holiday gift last month: the smallest property tax increase in county history.

On Dec. 15 the County Council adopted a 2001 budget that fully funds important public safety and human services programs, yet increased property tax collections by just 1.5 percent – less than the inflation rate and the smallest increase in county history.

As the Chairman of the County Council's 2001 budget process, I am particularly proud that the Council worked together on a bipartisan basis to pass a lean and focused county budget. In fact, it's the first budget in three years to be approved by all thirteen members of the Council.

We were able to provide property tax relief and maintain the core functions of county government by reducing overhead expenditures in areas like the county motor pool.

Families and businesses prioritize their spending, and the County Council did the same with our 2001 budget, prioritizing spending on the most important county programs:

- **Public Safety Programs:** We fully funded the county's public safety programs, including the Sheriff's Office, Medic One, the Prosecutor's Office and the King County Jail.
- **Human Services Programs:** We restored funding for senior centers, community health clinics, youth and family services programs and sexual assault prevention programs that the County Executive had suggested cutting in his October budget proposal.
- **The 4-H and Master Gardener Programs:** We restored funding for the WSU Cooperative Extension Service, which coordinates these popular and productive volunteer programs that were proposed for elimination by the Executive.
- **Roads Projects:** We funded more than \$54 million in roads projects for 2001, part of a six-year roads improvement program that totals over \$443 million — the largest six-year roads construction plan in the county's history.
- **Transit Projects:** We funded a number of capital improvements to the bus system, including improvements to the Eastgate Park and Ride.
- **Environmental Conservation Projects:** We made critical investments to preserve and protect our natural environment by funding more than \$19 million in parks, open space, and conservation projects.

Negotiating the county's 2001 budget wasn't an easy process. On Nov. 20 the County Council passed (on an 8-5 vote) a budget that complied with the property tax limitations of Initiative 722, which the voters approved at the November general election. Shortly thereafter the County Executive vetoed the budget and requested a \$10 million larger property tax increase.

After many hours of negotiations over the ensuing weeks, the County Council and the Executive settled on a 1.5 percent property tax increase and agreed to the budget we unanimously passed on Dec. 15.

I still believe we could have taken an even smaller property tax increase by agreeing on even more cuts to overhead and administration, but I'm very pleased with the budget that was ultimately negotiated. It provides genuine property tax relief and maintains funding for the county's most critical programs.

It has been an honor to serve as your representative on the County Council. I hope that you will not hesitate to contact my office should you have questions or comments about your county government.

Sincerely,

Rob McKenna



December 2000

Sound Transit Update

By now, you have all heard that the projected cost of Sound Transit's Link light rail program has dramatically increased. I have been concerned about the accuracy of Link's price tag since 1996, and have steadfastly maintained that the plan could not be completed on time and on budget. Here are the facts:

In 1996, phase one of the Link light rail program was projected to cost \$1.67 billion and last ten years.

Last November, Sound Transit announced the cost of Link had grown to \$1.924 billion in 1995 dollars.

Much of the increase was based on revised tunneling costs – from \$500 million to over \$700 million.

In December, staff told us the new price-tag for Link was \$2.6 billion in 1995

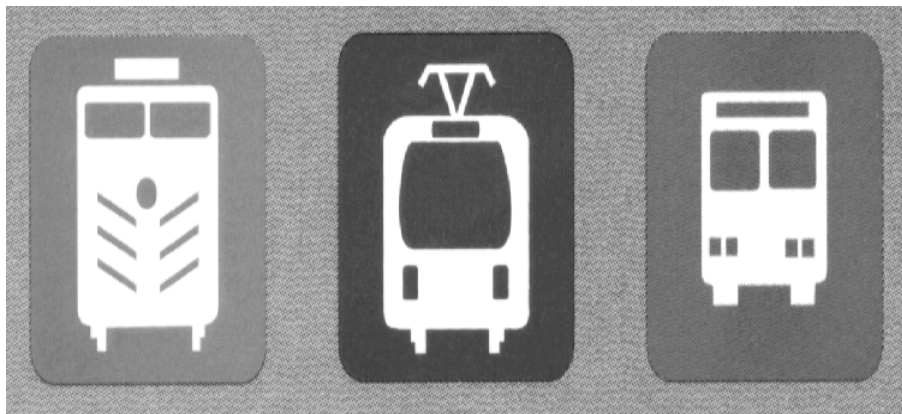
dollars, \$3.0 billion in current dollars, and \$3.6 billion in year of expenditure dollars and we haven't started digging.

In January, Sound Transit will consider signing a full funding grant agreement with the Federal Transit Administration. The FFGA is a contract; we agree to build Link and the federal government pledges \$500 million to help make it happen. The catch is, once we sign the agreement, we're legally required to finish the project, whether Congress appropriates the money or not, and regardless of any cost overruns!

To close the revenue gap and meet the terms of the FFGA, Sound Transit has proposed extending the

length of phase one an additional three years, from 2006 to 2009, delaying a public vote on reauthorizing the Sound Transit taxes. Staff have also proposed assuming an additional \$221 million in federal money.

How can we be certain the new cost estimates are accurate, when previous calculations were so far off? What will happen if we extend phase one for three years, and still can't pay for the project because of additional cost over-runs? Is it realistic to "assume" another \$200 million plus in federal funding?



Link supporters will tell you we can't wait another thirty years for rail, and that we must build this system *regardless of the cost*. They also say we must forge ahead with Link in Seattle, because it will serve as the spine for a regional system.

Currently, the projected cost for Link is \$171 million per mile for a 21-mile line. What will it cost for us to build the entire 120-mile system, \$200 million per mile? At what point do the total costs outweigh the total benefits? Is it \$20 billion or, a higher figure?

I believe it would be a breach of public trust to extend taxes beyond the ten-year deadline without a public vote. Let's recalculate the benefits as well as the costs of Link, and compare it to other alternatives such as an expanded bus and vanpool system, or a freeway monorail plan. **Let's spend our money on whichever alternative will generate the most new transit riders, at the lowest cost per rider,** and with the least damaging effect on our neighborhoods and the environment.

December 2000

Human Service Programs



Providing Human Service Programs Within a Fiscally Sound Budget

Helping the neediest neighbors in our community is an important function of county government, and I am delighted to report that the County Council worked on a bipartisan basis to pass a 2001 budget that restored funding for important human services programs that the County Executive had cut in his proposed budget.

I am particularly pleased to report that we were able to fully fund the county's human services programs while at the same time holding down the growth of property taxes.

Regional Human Service Programs

Many constituents called me with grave concerns after they heard that the Executive had proposed gutting the county's funding for programs like the King County Sexual Assault Resource Training Center, the Renton Community Health Center, the Eastside Literacy Council and Catholic Community Services' youth shelter.

Fortunately, the story has a happy ending. By reducing overhead expenses and finding other efficiencies in county government, we were able to restore funding for those programs and for other valuable human services programs.

Surplus Metro Vans

In December the County Council distributed 26 surplus Metro vans to social service organizations across the county. I nominated Skiforall Foundation and the City of Renton to receive vans in our community. Skiforall is an organization that provides opportunities in outdoor recreation for children and adults with disabilities. The City of Renton will use its van to provide transportation for activities and special events for its teen program and developmentally disabled program.

Local Programs

Several local agencies and projects will receive grants that I proposed for inclusion in the county's 2001 budget. These organizations serve a range of diverse needs of our community, from housing for the homeless, to support for the arts, to providing educational and recreational opportunities for all members of our community.

The **Bellevue Boys and Girls Club** will receive \$10,000 to provide programs for local youth, and **Eastside Adult Day Services** will receive \$10,000 to support its programs for the elderly in our community.

The **Mercer Island Boys and Girls Club** and **Mercer Island Youth and Family Services** received grants of \$2,500 each, as did **Youth Eastside Services**.

The **Renton Community Foundation**, established to support a variety of service organizations in the City of Renton, will also receive funding in the county's 2001 budget.

Other local organizations that will receive funding include: **Food Lifeline**, **Congregations for the Homeless**, **Youth Theater Northwest**, **Eastside Domestic Violence Program**, **King County Sexual Assault Resource Center**, and **Washington Women in Need**.

Human Services In The Future

There are some who fear that human services programs might have to be cut in the future as the county's budgets get tighter and tighter. I believe there is still plenty of room for county government to become more efficient by reducing administration and overhead expenses, as we did in our 2001 budget process. If we keep working to make government more efficient, I remain confident that we will be able to continue provide funding for human services programs.

December 2000

Town Hall

Meet with King County Councilmember Rob McKenna

Please join us:

January 20:

10- 11:30 a.m. **Bellevue City Hall Council Chambers**
11511 Main Street, Bellevue, WA

1:30 - 3:00 p.m. **Renton Community Center**
1715 Maple Valley Highway, Renton, WA



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Happy New Year
